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ABSTRACT

The prospects for managing the tension between accountability and improvement in further and higher education (FHE) were examined through a literature review and a 5-year ethnographic study of a change management project at a higher education college in Wales. Special attention was paid to the following challenges facing FHE: globalization; the impact of new technologies; and the rise of the corporate curriculum. The following lessons for change management and management practice were offered: (1) there is a difference between the planned outcomes of policy and those that emerge through implementation; (2) quality management becomes preoccupied with accountability; (3) there is no blueprint for quality management, and what is achievable should not be viewed from the standpoint of a "blank sheet"; (4) to respond to change effectively, leaders must be able to pose the "right" questions; and (5) to manage change effectively, institutional managers should assess the current and emerging climate of operation and be prepared to manage tensions. It was concluded that, although the tension between accountability and improvement may not be fully resolvable, acknowledgment of such tensions could make FHE managers better equipped to deal with the challenges they face as FHE enters the third millennium. (Contains 44 references.) (MN)

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Crossroads of the New Millennium

Strategic Management Of Quality And The Challenge Of The New Millennium: Prospects For Managing The Tension Between Accountability And Improvement In Further And Higher Education

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Theme Speaker

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Abstract

Throughout the 1990s 'quality' became a central concern in further and higher education (FHE) globally. This took place in the context of a changing relationship between the state and education. Demands for responsiveness and accountability have become paramount. As FHE reaches the new millennium, it finds itself at a crossroads. Education systems in the 21st century will be very different from current models because the context within which they will operate will change significantly. The paper sets out some of the parameters which are likely to prevail. Implications for the strategic management of quality are considered, as is the possibility that a paradigm shift will be required in quality assurance in FHE. The paper asks whether FHE organisations in the new millennium will be manageable entities. A key element will be the management of tensions, at the centre of which is a continuing requirement to reconcile and manage the tension between quality as 'accountability', and quality as 'improvement'.

The paper draws on results and lessons from a five-year, ethnographic study of a change management project at a higher education college, (NewColl). It is argued that in the process of design and implementation, quality management policy becomes changed and that it is necessary to take account of emergent as well as designed features of policy. Managers are constrained by contextual realities. If they are to intervene successfully they need to achieve alignment between change projects and the operating context. Accordingly, it will be important for individual institutions to assess and interpret the current and emerging climate of operation. This means paying attention to the preoccupations of external stakeholders and regulatory bodies, and to 'the psychological contract' with staff. But equally, it is argued, it is important to strike an appropriate balance between professional autonomy and professional accountability.

The paper concludes by proposing that education organisations are not beyond purposeful intervention - even in circumstances of turbulence, change and uncertainty - but that there are no simple 'futuristic' prescriptions for managing change projects. Following Fullan (1993), it is argued that 'Change is a journey, not a blueprint'.

Strategic Management of Quality and the Challenge of the New Millennium: Prospects for Managing the Tension between Accountability and Improvement in Further and Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

The theme of this paper is that for those aspiring to the successful management of change in quality and standards in further and higher education (FHE) as it enters the new millennium, it is essential to take full account of the tensions which emerge through the change and implementation processes. Managing change in the context of quality, it is argued, is concerned with managing tensions. At the centre of this is a continuing requirement to reconcile and manage the tension between 'quality' as accountability, and 'quality' as improvement.

The paper begins by reflecting on the legacy of the 'quality revolution' of the 1990s and by acknowledging that, as FHE enters the third millennium, quality has reached a crossroads. Some strategic challenges which face FHE in the new millennium are also identified. The tasks for strategic quality management arising from attempts to reconcile accountability and improvement are highlighted through consideration of an institutional case study. This leads in turn to discussion of how leadership and the management of change might be conceptualised. The paper also puts forward suggestions as to key ingredients for progressing change and quality management initiatives, drawing particular attention to 'alignment with context' and the emerging 'climate of operation', and the need to take account of the values and expectations of staff. The paper concludes by setting out some lessons for leadership and management practice which are relevant for the strategic management of quality in the new millennium.

QUALITY AT THE CROSSROADS: THE LEGACY OF THE 1990S

There is considerable interest in, and a growing number of contributions about, the likely form and structure of FHE in the twenty-first century, and re-evaluations are taking place in many countries. Clearly, FHE has been going through what Kuhn (1970) would describe as a paradigm shift. However, those playing the 'future' game have been largely unable to abandon the core elements of traditional notions of 'the university' or 'the college'.

An underlying theme of the paper is that as FHE enters the new millennium, it finds itself at a crossroads in terms of quality and also, increasingly, both academic and service standards. Implications for the strategic management of quality and for the development of quality assurance systems are considerable. But to understand the immediate challenges of the future, it is necessary to reflect on the influence of the recent past.

Undeniably, one of the main legacies of the 1990s is that quality has become a central concern in FHE globally. This development has taken place in the context of a changed relationship between the state and FHE in which demands for accountability have become paramount. For some commentators, and for many in the academic community, these developments are associated with the rise of 'managerialism', and even a withdrawal of the 'trust' accorded to FHE, not least in the wake of more demanding external regimes for quality assessment and accreditation (Trow, 1994). Such developments can be set alongside demands for greater responsiveness from FHE to the requirements of an increasingly global workplace. Within these parameters there has been a dramatic increase in student numbers, a sharply reducing unit of resource, higher student-staff ratios, and changes in sources and methods of funding. Massification, cost effectiveness, performance assessment, standards, institutional and market accountability, have all become keywords. Institutions have yet to fully resolve the growing challenges represented by changes in funding methodologies, the student profile, academic practices, new technologies, and delivery mechanisms. Moreover, as is illustrated in the next section, further and higher education systems in the 21st century will be very different from current models because the context within which they will operate will continue to undergo further significant change.

As far as quality is concerned, by the end of the 1990s changes in the context and conditions of academic work (Smyth, 1995; Martin, 1999), particularly when viewed alongside the pressures of external accountability and a higher level of expectations from a variety of stakeholders, had led many to question whether, with a general movement towards massification in systems of FHE, quality could be maintained or managed effectively, or whether requirements for 'accountability' and 'quality improvement' could be reconciled. It has led to the acknowledgement that the challenges to institutional leadership in today's further

education colleges and higher education institutions are considerable and will become even more so during the new millennium.

As this paper suggests, in view of the extension of the monitoring activities of external quality and accreditation bodies, and the development of 'robust' internal quality monitoring arrangements, there is no doubt that increased accountability and intrusion have presented a significant challenge for institutions and staff at all levels. Many academics have grown increasingly sceptical of, and resistant to, the growth of the 'quality industry' and the 'quality burden' (Watson, 1995). This is often viewed in terms of academic de-professionalisation (Trow, 1994). For many 'front-line' staff this has led to suspicion of management motives, to the breakdown of reciprocal accountability and trust, and perhaps even to an irresolvable tension between the 'corporation' and the 'collegium'. For senior managers it has led to new challenges in terms of leadership and institutional management.

PARAMETERS FOR FHE SYSTEMS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The extent of such challenges becomes even more evident when we note the complexity of the post-industrial environment which FHE faces as it enters the new millennium. The dynamic nature of this environment is such that academic organisations and institutional managers will require appropriate 'adaptation strategies' (Sporn, 1999), and effective management in terms of policy making and policy implementation, not least in the area of quality and standards. Several key dimensions of this changing external 'task environment' (Middlehurst, 1997) merit attention for present purposes. These are: increasing globalisation; the impact of new technologies; and the rise of the corporate curriculum. As is illustrated below, each of these in turn raises its own particular issues regarding quality and standards.

a) Some Strategic Challenges Facing FHE in the New Millennium

GLOBALISATION

Globalisation is not new. It has been an integral element of debates regarding the health of national economies and organisational futures for some decades. But colleges in the FHE sector are increasingly aware that they operate in a global environment and, accordingly, are seeking to reflect in their curricular the internationalisation of education and training, and of business and career mobility. Moreover, with the development of both satellite and electronic

international multimedia communication, there is no doubt that the successful colleges of the twenty-first century will be efficient and effective in terms of both the delivery as well as the production of knowledge. In this context, quality assurance of new forms of production and delivery of educational materials will become a major issue.

IMPACT OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

The global internet and digital technologies represent a major catalyst for change. The design and delivery of educational programmes will need to keep pace. The rise and burgeoning success of the corporate university (Corporate University Survey, 1999), for example, illustrates the potential for targeting learning opportunities at specific sectors of the population, and shaping the style, mode and content of education around an analysis of quite specific needs and requirements.

Clearly, improvements in teaching and learning can readily be achieved through harnessing new technologies. However, technology is also forcing a seismic shift in various balances and relationships. The growth of expert systems, the decreasing shelf-life of knowledge, and the routinisation of hitherto 'professional' and 'academic' tasks are but a few examples of developments which have considerable implications for curriculum design and for systems for quality assurance or accreditation. How far, for example, can approaches to accreditation and quality assurance intended for human systems be transformed so as to be reconciled with autonomous software systems? Or, is an entire paradigm shift in academic quality assurance required?

THE RISE OF THE CORPORATE CURRICULUM

As individual colleges seek to become more learning-focused and to successfully communicate their 'corporate brand' (King, 1995) to students and employers, they face a number of obstacles. Traditionally, the predominant view has been that the core of the academic enterprise, the course as 'product', and the quality and standards 'control' of the product, lies largely outside corporate control. While, in the private sector, the 'product' is subject to strict managerial monitoring, in colleges issues such as curriculum structure and delivery have traditionally been regarded as largely collegial, peer-related, or even individual matters. However, as the notion of 'curriculum as product' becomes reality, and as colleges search for

growth and efficiency, but with improved quality and standards, then it will become an organisational requirement that senior managers will be carried more directly into the heart of the academic domain.

The challenge for quality management, centres in part on the tensions between, on the one hand, the local level of department, the point of maximum professional and academic autonomy in terms of curriculum delivery and design, and, on the other hand, the requirement for wider institutional solutions to problems which arise from the need for the 'product' to meet institutional targets. This scenario, and the changes which it signals, is as likely to be as unsettling and threatening for middle managers as for 'front-line' lecturers, since it will undermine traditional departmental configurations and territorialities in respect of programme and curriculum control. More generally, it may make the tension between 'corporation' and 'collegium' even less resolvable.

Given such anticipated features of the changing external environment as those identified it is self-evident that, as FHE enters the new millennium, it finds itself at a crossroads. The attendant challenges for the strategic management of quality are considerable. Indeed, one of the key questions which the paper asks is whether FHE organisations in the new millennium will be manageable entities. The view put forward here is that managers are constrained by contextual realities. Moreover, if institutional managers are to intervene successfully for the purpose of the strategic management of quality and standards, they need to achieve alignment between change projects and the operating context. A key feature of this is the management of tensions, not least with regard to the continuing task of reconciling the requirements for accountability with those for improvement in the area of quality management. Here, the interests of various stakeholders come into play, from staff and students to various other interest groups, such as funding bodies, regulatory and accreditation bodies, and collaborative partners. There is no doubt that the range of, and balance between, stakeholders will change as FHE proceeds into a new era. But what, specifically, are likely to be the prevailing parameters for FHE systems?

b) The FHE System of the Twenty-First Century

Until the 1980s the rate of change in FHE had been relatively slow. This quickened during the 1990s to such an extent that it is evident that FHE in the twenty-first century will differ greatly both in terms of models and operating context. Arguably, as Harvey (1996) has indicated in his discussion of the 'federal omniversity', key features will include a regional, federated structure involving, perhaps: a federation of semi-autonomous institutions located in a geographic region; a focus on all levels of post-compulsory education; closer and more direct links with commerce and industry; more learning in the workplace; electronic networking and the disappearance of fixed boundaries. More specifically, this would entail:

- a mass, internationalised system shaped by information technology
- smoother access for students and continuous lifelong education in college, work and home
- disappearance of lectures and a shift towards tutor roles centred around facilitating learning
- clear emphasis on student attainment and learning outcomes
- quality and standards which take account of international comparability
- greater emphasis on quality culture and less emphasis on external monitoring regimes
- downward shift in the level of government funding; more emphasis on 'pay-as-you-learn'

c) Some Implications for Quality and Standards

Where, then, does quality fit into this projected scenario? Under such a model, primary responsibility for setting standards and for monitoring quality is placed on the institution, with the notion of 'self-regulation' becoming predominant (Jackson, 1996). Harvey (1996) refers to this in terms of 'responsive accountability' and 'delegated responsibility for quality improvement'. As argued earlier, there will be a continuing need to reconcile the requirements for 'accountability' and 'improvement'. However, quality monitoring systems in the twenty-first century will need to address concerns such as the following:

- effective action-oriented internal processes for quality monitoring and improvement
- explicit service standards relating to the quality of the student experience
- internationally comparable standards for student attainment and an explicit focus on employability
- effective use of funding

RECONCILING THE TENSION BETWEEN ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPROVEMENT: A CASE STUDY

At this juncture, to assist discussion of the main themes of the paper relating to quality management and the management of policy implementation in circumstances of change and uncertainty, use is made, for illustrative purposes, of an institutional case study and an 'insider' research project.

a) Design, Development and Implementation of a Quality Assurance System

The context for the longitudinal research which I undertook over a five-year period, can be gleaned in part from the rationale which underpinned the organisational change and policy initiative for which I had strategic responsibility. The quality management project involved reviewing and developing quality assurance procedures at a higher education college (NewColl) which would enable it to fulfil its vision of achieving 'University College' status.

There were a number of drivers of change impacting on the college's 'task environment' (Middlehurst, 1997) and these heavily influenced the definition and design of the components and formal properties of the quality assurance system - what contingency theorists (Child, 1984) refer to as their intended and designed features. The development aims for the system centred around accountability and improvement and included:

- satisfying external accountability requirements of funding council, and other national quality bodies, for robust quality assurance arrangements;
- satisfying internal requirements for procedures which withstand internal and external scrutiny; and
- facilitating quality development and improvement of the student learning experience and the student and staff learning and working environment.

The overall project was undertaken in circumstances of organisational turbulence, rapid change, and prolonged uncertainty in the external environment. Moreover, in such circumstances, the task of reconciling the underlying tension, as represented by the demands of accountability and those of improvement, posed a considerable challenge in terms of quality management, the management of change and institutional leadership. From this case study a number of lessons can be drawn which have general applicability in the context of the present discussion. These are set out in the final section of the paper.

b) 'Insider Research' Project

As noted, in addition to acting as project manager for the design and implementation of quality assurance systems, I was also, simultaneously, conducting an ethnographic study of the college. The research aims included investigation of whether, in the view of key stakeholders such as quality monitoring bodies, and academic and academic support staff, the purposes of the quality assurance system had been met: whether internal and external accountability requirements had been satisfied, and quality improvement facilitated for staff and students. A range of methods and data sources was used to convert 'thin' into 'thick' descriptions (Geertz, 1973, ch. 1) and to provide insights into staff perceptions of the achievements of quality assurance procedures and quality management generally.

c) Results: Policy Implementation Gap

As described more extensively elsewhere (Newton, 1999), the main results of my research, both qualitative and quantitative, revealed that while academic and academic support staff, at all levels, concurred with the view that both external and internal accountability requirements had been met, there was a marked 'implementation gap' requiring explanation. This was manifested in three major divergences.

i. evidence from external quality reports indicated that quality improvement requirements had been met, whereby interview data with NewColl staff showed markedly less support for such a view.
ii. differences were also apparent, on most issues, between the views of 'managers' and 'managed'.
iii. some academic units displayed more negative views on key issues regarding the quality system, quality management and organisational change, than others.

This meant that accountability and improvement had not been fully reconciled. This was because situational factors relating to climate of operation, context, and actors' subjectivities, mediated to prevent accountability and improvement from being fully reconciled and served to undermine the implementation of preferred institutional policy. In the present context, to support the underlying theme of this paper, relating to the need for institutional managers to paying close attention to the current and emerging climate of operation, and to the

'psychological contract' with staff, it is suggested that the kinds of challenges which this points to will have a continuing relevance for understanding some of the key tasks which will confront institutional managers as they enter a new millennium which carries with it its own environmental uncertainties and potential for organisational complexity and even 'grotesque turbulence' (Webb, 1995) in FHE.

d) Principal Quality Management Challenges at NewColl

The challenges which face a senior manager seeking to intervene with purpose in a complex, developing situation, in a highly professionalised organisation, are many. At NewColl, the principal challenges which presented themselves in the 'quality project', and which, it is suggested, will continue to be directly relevant for the strategic management of quality in FHE as it enters the third millennium, can be summarised as follows:

- the task of attempting to reconcile the demands of accountability and improvement
- the need to seek alignment between 'philosophy', 'technology', and 'context'
- sustaining the integrity of the quality system, especially from the point of view of staff
- the requirement to deliver tangible and measurable improvements for staff and students
- the need to develop and implement a quality management system which delivers improved quality rather than merely an improved system or 'better bureaucracy'
- the requirement for effective leadership and communication in support of change management efforts
- address the 'psychological contract' with staff

CONCEPTUALISING LEADERSHIP AND THE MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

Identifying and meeting such challenges is clearly crucial for institutional managers if they are to be able to intervene purposefully in the developing organisational situations which lie ahead. But this in turn is greatly facilitated by the ability to conceptualise change management effectively and realistically.

a) The Notions of 'Culture' and 'Organisation'

It is now commonplace to depict and conceptualise institutions of FHE in terms of 'organisation'. As Weil (1994, p 24) noted in her discussion of the emergence of what were then relatively new notions of organisation and management: Five years ago, to refer to a

university or college as an 'organisation' ran contrary to the deeply embedded currents of professional autonomy and 'collegiality' in decision making. But FHE has moved on from McNay's collegial academy (McNay, 1995), or the tribes and territories portrayed in Becher's academic community (Becher, 1989).

Some insights into this are afforded by considering the notions of 'culture' and 'organisational culture'. 'Culture', it is argued, should be viewed pluralistically; 'organisational culture' entails competing value systems and should be viewed as socially constructed by actors rather than merely enacted by members of an organisation. Indeed, there are dangers in viewing organisations as entirely rational entities. Moreover, my research confirms that it is prudent to avoid uncritical notions of the manager as 'change hero', or as the sole determinant of change.

b) Managing Policy Change: the Challenge of Unpredictability

As noted in the earlier discussion of strategic challenges facing FHE as it enters the new millennium, academic organisations face considerable uncertainty and change, and also tensions which need to be understood in order to be managed. However, as Wilson (1992) observes, in much of the organisational change literature it is the management of change rather than the analysis of change which predominates. For Burnes (1996), such approaches are open to criticism due to their limited applicability to the range and complexity of situations found in everyday organisational life (p 110). A linked issue when analysing change is the extent to which change processes should be viewed as 'planned' or 'emergent'. In this paper, following Burnes (1996), the emergent approach is viewed as attractive since it stresses the developing and unpredictable nature of change (Burnes, 1996, p 187). It recognises that some organisations operate in a turbulent, dynamic and unpredictable environment...to which they continually have to adapt (p 194).

It follows that one of the principal messages of my research is the importance of context for the management of policy initiatives (Pettigrew, 1983). What is achievable with 'quality' in a FHE organisation should not be seen as a blank sheet. The size, stage of development, strategic priorities, blend of organisational politics, and even the particular vulnerabilities of a college, are key considerations. They represent a complex combination of constraint and

opportunity. This raises questions around whether organisations are manageable entities. It also resonates with the sorts of concerns and problems which arise from discussions of issues around the 'quality at the crossroads of the millennium' theme.

c) Leadership and Change

Context and circumstances are also key considerations when conceptualising leadership. As Middlehurst (1991, p 3) suggests: Leadership is linked both to a context and a constituency, it is commonly viewed as a contingent construct. Following Adair (1983), Middlehurst (1997, p 188) also notes the symbiotic relationship between change and leadership. Drawing attention to Adair's (1983) observations on changing contexts, uncertainty and instability, Middlehurst observes that: The existence and the experience of a turbulent environment...creates both a psychological and a practical need for leadership (p 188). The reference here to the 'psychological' and 'practical' requirement for effective leadership in circumstances of turbulence and uncertainty again resonates with the underlying concerns which arise in the context of the 'crossroads of the millennium' theme. This dimension is developed further in the next section of the paper.

d) The Importance of Context and Climate of Operation

In my research, to facilitate understanding of the particular case study and research site, NewColl, I explored several conceptual approaches. These are, the contingency approach (Hinings et. al., 1971; Child, 1984; Mullins, 1989); garbage can theory (Cohen et. al., 1972; March and Olsen, 1976); and the contextualist perspective (Pettigrew, 1983; 1985). In selecting these I followed Williams (1988), whose purpose in choosing this interpretive set in his studies of corporate planning was to encompass both the designed and emergent properties of organisations and to find a means of analysing the cultural and micropolitical dimensions of organisational change (p 8).

The contingency approach is principally concerned with the designed and intended properties of organisations. Alignment and judgement are important considerations; there is no 'one best way'. Garbage can theory focuses primarily on the emergent features of organisations. March and Olsen (1976) specifically address higher education institutions. This theory is informed by the notion of organisations as 'organised anarchies'. In focusing on the political or irrational

aspects of organisation, the approach rejects the rational linear view of planning, implementation and decision-making.

Contextualist analysis is preoccupied with both the intended and emergent features of organisation and can therefore be readily related to contingency and garbage can approaches. For Wilson (1992), one of the noteworthy features of Pettigrew's (1985) work is the attempt to span both process and implementation. Williams (1988) placed similar emphasis on this iterative aspect of policy making and implementation, noting that: Contextualist analysis aims to provide managers with an understanding of the iterative relationship between context, process and outcomes (p 12). In my own case, contextualist analysis succeeded in providing a basis upon which, as researcher, manager, and reflective practitioner, I could understand and manage the change process and the underlying tensions. My research has validated the contextualists' view that managers are neither 'change heroes' nor 'passive victims'. Contextualist analysis alerted me to the emergent properties of the environment, the organisation, and the quality system. This again has a considerable bearing on matters which the notion of 'quality at the crossroads of the millennium' prompts us to consider and reflect upon.

MAKING PROGRESS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY: KEY FACTORS IN CHANGE INITIATIVES

From the foregoing, it is suggested that there are four areas which provide points of reference for institutional managers wishing to intervene in developing organisational situations for the purpose of progressing quality management initiatives. These are:

- alignment with the 'realities of context'
- the psychological contract
- leadership, communication and the management of change
- professional autonomy or professional accountability?

a) Alignment with the 'Realities of Context'

The design and development of the quality assurance system at NewColl is best understood in terms of Williams (1996, p 62) framework, developed to evaluate his own college's policy and practice, the key elements of which are 'philosophy', 'technology', 'context' and

'alignment'. As with Williams (p 62), alignment was sought between philosophy, technology and the realities of context. Each is discussed briefly below.

PHILOSOPHY

Here, philosophy is taken to mean the shared values and ideals, which inform the approach to quality (Williams, 1996, p 61). A key reference point was the requirement of external quality bodies and other stakeholders for self-assessment and self-evaluation at programme level and also at institutional level.

The features of a quality culture to which NewColl aspired can be depicted in the following elements, drawn from the HEQC publication 'Learning from Audit':

- an open and active commitment to quality at institutional levels, and an enthusiasm for and commitment to teaching, learning and the care of students
- a willingness to engage in self-evaluation and to adopt a self-critical approach to academic
- activities with a focus on development and improvement
- a firm regulatory framework, clarity and consistency of procedures and explicit responsibilities for quality control and quality assurance
- dedication and conscientious support for quality assurance among administrators
- communication and liaison across the university, an emphasis on obtaining feedback from a broad range of constituencies and a clear commitment to identifying and spreading good practice
- prompt, appropriate and sensitive managerial action to redress problems, supported by adequate information (HEQC, 1994, p 5)

This describes well the elements with which I, as quality manager, sought to underpin NewColl's system. It also describes what I regard as universal requirements for quality management systems in FHE.

TECHNOLOGY

'Technology' equates with the components of a quality system. Currently, a typical set of arrangements for a college's academic quality assurance system includes the following:

- systems for quality assurance

- operation of quality assurance systems
- personnel involved in quality assurance
- integration of validation, review and monitoring.

Moreover, one would typically expect to find processes for:

- the validation and review of programmes
- annual monitoring
- making amendments to programmes
- preparation for external quality assessment at programme and institutional levels
- student feedback.

In sum such a system would entail procedures which focused on:

- the design of a programme
- the inputs to the programme
- the programme process
- the outcomes of the programme

Arguably, this dimension of 'technology' represents one of the greatest areas of difficulty and challenge as FHE enters a period of uncertainty and change wherein the design, delivery, and indeed globalisation of education take on new and unprecedented features. Key shifts which will present a severe test for institutions, either individually or collaboratively, include: trends towards partnerships; new forms of delivery; more online and distance provision; and the emergence of corporations which offer both programmes and awards and which present severe competition for more traditional providers. The traditional role of academics as professionals at the centre of quality assurance and quality monitoring will also undergo considerable change. All of this means that much of the 'technology' of current regulatory, accreditation, and quality assurance arrangements is already beginning to undergo change, and is in some cases looking distinctly outmoded.

CLIMATE OF OPERATION

A further message from my research is that it is important always for individual institutions and senior managers to assess the current and emerging climate of operation. Clearly, this is

also an important message as we look towards the kinds of changes in the operating environment which have been described and anticipated earlier.

This element of 'climate of operation' requires that attention be paid to the preoccupations of external stakeholders and regulatory bodies, and also, as is argued in the next section, to the expectations of, and 'psychological contract' with, staff. At NewColl, the challenge of meeting such expectations was compounded by a combination of circumstances including sector-wide problems of a changing funding methodology, government capping of student numbers, a declining unit of resource throughout the sector, and severe competition from other colleges in the sector.

This focus on 'climate of operation' points to the need to pay attention to the important precept of 'alignment' (Child, 1984), a key concept for contingency theory. Moreover, it also reveals that an appreciation of the need to manage tensions is a key element of the change manager's ability to intervene, with any degree of success, in a developing organisational situation.

b) The Psychological Contract

A second key element for consideration in the management of change in the area of quality management relates to the expectations of staff. This is of particular importance where there is a combination of uncertainty at organisational level and a degree of unpredictability in the external environment. This will often mean that academic and support staff are faced with circumstances which combine to produce conditions in which low morale, and a degree of alienation and resignation can flourish. In such circumstances staff perceptions of, and relationships with, senior managers are a key variable. In circumstances of turbulence and rapid change, concerns may be manifested in feelings of neglect by management, and of a lack of control and influence over strategy and policy matters affecting academic units.

In their discussion of leadership and management in higher education, Middlehurst and Elton (1992, p 255) cite Handy's notion of psychological contracts (Handy, 1993), described as sets of expectations, between individuals and the different sub-organisations to which they relate within the organisation as a whole. It is suggested that this idea of the psychological

contract can assist in the present evaluation of the prospects and challenges for managing quality in FHE as colleges address the challenges of the new millennium. As Handy (1993) puts it:

> Just as in most work situations there is a legal contract between the organisation and the individual...so there is an implied, usually unstated, psychological contract between the individual and the organisation...We have a set of results that we expect from the organisation, results that will satisfy certain of our needs and in return for which we will expend some of our energies and talents (p 45).

From this I would argue that, with any change management initiative, alongside attending to context and climate of operation, it is essential to take full account of the expectations and values of staff. This in turn points to the need for effective communication to underpin leadership and management.

c) Leadership, Communication and the Management of Change

Sallis (1994, p 237) argues that, while one of the principal functions of leadership in a college is to enhance the quality of learning and also to support the staff who deliver it, nevertheless:

> Leadership has not been given the prominence it deserves in the quality debate. There has been an overconcentration on quality systems and insufficient attention has been paid to the management of quality, and in particular to the nature of the leadership required to develop a quality college. A quality culture involves strong and purposeful leadership at all levels (p 238).

As is suggested in the discussion of 'the psychological contract', it is evident that leadership and management issues are particularly prominent in staff concerns during periods of uncertainty and rapid internal and external change. Linked to this are matters such as communication, vision and direction, and the management of change.

Though the specifics may differ, such problems will be familiar to anyone who has been involved in a change management or quality management role in education. One of the

contributors to the 'Managing for quality' case studies (HEQC, 1995, p 80) lists the following elements as contributing to the leadership problems which he inherited, and which he describes in terms of recovering direction and morale in a changing climate:

- resistance to change (exacerbated by poor management)
- poor leadership
- feelings of alienation amongst staff.

By the same token, Partington and Brodie's (1992, p 6) description of a department which has strong leadership includes the following:

- all staff feel well treated
- their competence is respected
- initiative is recognised and rewarded
- staff support each other
- high corporate values are developed.

In the context of the present discussion of leadership, the reflections of the contributor to the 'Managing for quality' case studies (HEQC, 1995) again seem particularly pertinent to the two schools considered in the paper. He had inherited a group of staff who had been through a period of rapid and uncomfortable change with poor leadership from my predecessor (p 80). Moreover, in circumstances not dissimilar to those prevailing at NewColl, with the attempts to implement new systems, the case study author reports that:

> In a period of substantial change, in which the University's modular framework was put in place and the unit of resource was dramatically reduced, the staff were receiving no leadership and poor management...There was no unifying vision in the School, nor any means of the University's values being translated and communicated to staff (p 80).

Drawing on such material, two observations are offered here. The first draws once again on the 'Managing for quality' case study (HEQC, 1995). The contributor notes that, at his own university, just as had been the case at NewColl, there was a commitment to a management style which is based on consultation and development, rather than on the exercise of power (p

81). However, he also reflected on the difficulties involved: I am not fully confident that the University senior management is aware of all of [the] implications of the management approach which we are taking (p 81). In the second point I would concur with Meade (1997) who argues that leadership is important at all levels within an institution. He cites Leigh's (1988, p 18) view that leadership is not the exclusive preserve of the most senior manager, since in the modern organisation the autonomy of the individual must be a central focal point of management thinking. One of the implications of this is that, while academic staff are entitled to expect effective leadership, they too have a professional responsibility to use their relative autonomy or any responsibility devolved to them, to best effect. It is to such matters that attention turns now.

d) Professional Autonomy or Professional Accountability?

One of the consequences of introducing change in the area of quality management and quality assurance systems, is that new policies and procedures are premised on assumptions about the need for new work practices and new internal accountabilities, with new demands being placed on staff. As can be readily illustrated by considering the reactions, in some quarters, associated with newly introduced quality assurance arrangements at NewColl, this may present considerable problems from a management of change point of view. Some staff displayed an element of conservatism and independence in quality assurance matters, and also looked to 'preferred' and 'established' ways of doing things. There was a strong inward-looking focus on 'the old system', with change initiatives and new quality management frameworks being associated in some quarters with de-professionalisation and a threat to autonomy.

Marris (1975, p 156) has used the experience of bereavement to understand such reactions to innovation and change in organisations. He notes that:

> people cannot reconcile themselves to the loss of familiar attachments in terms of some impersonal utilitarian calculation of the common good. They have to find their own meaning in these changes before they can live with them. Hence the reformers must listen as well as explain...If they impatiently cut this process short, their reforms are likely to be abortive.

Becher (1992) draws on Bailey's (1973) study of the effects of change in peasant studies to illustrate the position which the notions of academic autonomy and professional discretion hold in academic life. Bailey (1973, p 8) observes that the more ramifying the expected consequences of introducing an item into a system, the more difficult is likely to be its acceptance.

This discussion highlights the contentious nature of issues surrounding professionalism, professional responsibility, and accountability. Harvey (1995) has taken a very clear line on the importance of ensuring that, in the interests of continuous quality improvement, academics, as professionals, use their relative autonomy responsibly. Moreover, in his comparison of 'cloisterism' and 'new collegialism' Harvey (1995, p 35) depicts the former in terms such as 'traditional', 'isolationist', 'individual', 'defensive' and 'wary of change'. In contrast, the latter is seen as 'open' and 'responsive'. The 'new collegialist' academic 'welcomes change' and is open to 'explicit quality criteria'. As Harvey (1995, p 35) notes:

> New collegialism and cloisterism represent ends of a spectrum of positions and approaches to academia. Both tendencies can be found in most higher education institutions and in most discipline areas.

What Harvey points to here is that obtaining an appropriate balance between professional autonomy and professional accountability is an increasingly important feature of the management of change in FHE. These sentiments are echoed by Jackson (1998, p 8) in his discussion of the core characteristics of the self-regulating university. For Jackson, the 'professionalism' of the individual academic should be regarded as a key variable if self-regulation is to become established in the future college or university system:

> The health and integrity of the regulatory regime is, to a large measure, dependent on [a] sense of professional responsibility and obligation at the level of the individual (p 133).

There is an important message here regarding the need for institutional managers to take appropriate measures that will enable them to identify, respond to and manage reactions to change and innovation. Failure to do so will endanger aspirations to move towards a greater degree of self-regulation in quality assurance matters.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICE IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM: MANAGING CHANGE, MANAGING TENSIONS

It is evident from the foregoing, that, insofar as institutional managers face a continuing task of reconciling the tension between accountability and improvement, and that, insofar as they are constrained by contextual realities, then the challenges of intervening purposefully and successfully in the complex and fluid organisational situations of the future are considerable. Even so, it has been argued that progress in the management of quality can be assisted, firstly, by conceptualising change and policy development in realistic terms and, secondly, by identifying and paying attention to what might be regarded as key factors in change initiatives. Towards this end, I have suggested that it is essential that managers understand their own organisations and that, moreover, they should take care to operate with a flexible approach to policy making and policy implementation and the management of change. Quality management, it is proposed, will always be affected by situational factors.

Reflecting the foregoing, it is possible at this juncture to set out a number of lessons for change management and management practice. The lessons to be drawn are as follows:

Lesson 1: There is a difference between the planned outcomes of policy and those which emerge through implementation

Institutional managers need to be alert to the emergence of an 'implementation gap' between what is designed into or intended for a policy, and factors which may prevent this from being achieved. This means that 'quality policy' is changed in the implementation process and that any quality management system or change initiative will always be impacted upon by situational factors. This points to the argument that the 'real makers of policy' are policy users (Prottas, 1978). In other words, in addition to focusing on the dimension of 'strategic management', it is essential to pay close attention to how policy is received and decoded.

Lesson 2: Quality management becomes preoccupied with accountability

A well-developed quality assurance system can provide a FHE institution with an anchor point and a stabilising influence in an often-turbulent environment. However, the requirements and expectations of the state, of external quality monitoring bodies, and other key stakeholders, mean that, in design and operational terms, 'quality' becomes linked with the exigencies of accountability. This can mean that quality systems may come to be viewed more in terms of 'technology' and 'discipline' than quality improvement or transformation of the learner. To help to counter this, it is necessary to achieve an appropriate balance between the professional autonomy of staff and the kind of professional accountability implied by the notion of 'new collegialism' (Harvey, 1995).

Lesson 3: There is no blueprint for quality management; what is achievable should not be viewed from the standpoint of a 'blank sheet'

While the desirable components of a quality system may not be difficult to identify, my research indicates that the search for a blueprint is flawed, perhaps even naive. There are a range of ways in which circumstances surrounding the design, development and implementation of a quality assurance system may serve to undermine or subvert an idealistic, blueprint-driven approach to quality assurance policy and change management. Managers do not begin with a blank sheet. As Fullan (1993, p 1) argues: "Change is a journey, not a blueprint". This is an important message for change agents as we face the challenges of the third millennium.

Lesson 4: To respond effectively to change, leaders must be able to pose the 'right' questions

Sporn (1999) has noted a range of internal responses, which have been triggered by external change within colleges and universities. She sets this in the context of a discussion of policy, innovation and adaptive structures. Her discussion raises issues around how institutional managers set about framing the questions which inform debate about strategy and future directions. Reflecting on changes in the recent past in the European context, she highlights three areas of particular interest. Firstly, the trend of restructuring, which now includes re-

engineering and reform of academic and administrative arrangements. Secondly, the development of strategies to evaluate and improve quality in programmes and teaching, the purpose of which, Sporn argues, is not only to secure better accountability but also to provide a new basis for allocating resources more effectively. Thirdly, the transformation and redefinition of leadership, management and governance in colleges and universities with the importance of context becoming increasingly recognised in decision making and governance.

Looking to the future, the sorts of questions, which need to be addressed by FHE in the context of strategic quality management, may include:

- what is the appropriate structure for the college?
- how should academic processes and structures be (re-) configured?
- how should the curriculum offer and its mode(s) of delivery be changing?
- how far and in what ways will the staff base and staff profile need to change?
- how should quality assurance and quality control arrangements be evolved to
- reflect such change?

Lesson 5: To manage change effectively institutional managers should assess the current and emerging climate of operation and be prepared to manage tensions

A further lesson is that it is important for individual institutions to assess the current and emerging climate of operation. This means paying attention to the preoccupations of external stakeholders and regulatory bodies, and what they bring to bear at any one point in time, and also to the values and expectations of staff within an institution, 'the psychological contract'.

By focusing on 'climate of operation', managers may more effectively achieve 'alignment' (Child, 1984) between philosophy (quality culture), technology (quality system), and the realities of context (regulatory context). The general application of this is that by giving attention to alignment with prevailing circumstances, it is possible to ascertain what outcomes are most likely from what combination of external and internal constraining forces and opportunities, and also what approach to management might be appropriate.

CONCLUSION

A central thread running through the paper has been the influence of context, the unpredictability of change, and the absence of simple prescriptions for successfully managing change projects. This prompts questioning as to whether managers should be regarded as 'change heroes' or 'passive victims'. The view taken here is that managers are neither one nor the other and that, even where turbulence and uncertainty predominate, organisations of FHE are not beyond purposeful intervention by managers. Through reflective practice, and self-evaluation more generally, a manager is able, through time, to develop an acute awareness of a developing institutional context and its climate of operation, and to respond meaningfully and purposefully on the basis of such an assessment. While the tension between 'accountability' and 'improvement' may not be fully resolvable, acknowledgement of such tensions can be a basis for intervening with purpose, since it provides a basis for understanding prior to design and intervention. This, it is argued, makes managers better equipped to deal with the challenges which they face as FHE enters the third millennium.

Author's note

Details of the study institution, the respondents, and other non-essential details, have been changed in the interests of protecting the anonymity of the institution and the individuals concerned.

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